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Dancing on the limen~~~Embodied and Creative Inter-Places as Thresholds of Be(com)ing: Phenomenological Perspectives on Liminality and Transitional Spaces in Organisation and Leadership

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Abstract

Based on the insights of advanced phenomenology, this paper inquires into spaces and places of transition and liminality in organisations and leader-/followership. After interpreting liminality relationally, basic ideas of a phenomenology of space and embodied place as media for transition are given. The text then discusses the significance of liminality and transitional space in organisations and leadership, particularly its embodied and emotional dimensions as well as ambivalences and ambiguities. In conclusion implications and perspectives on research and practice for transitional spaces and embodied place in organisations and leadership are provided.

Introduction

At present, organisations and its members with their embedding cultural and societal contexts are exposed to an increased occurrence of changes. They move through transitional states with high levels of insecurity, uncertainty and disorder and exist in precarious positions. These shifts require organisations to respond to various challenges, transform and reconstruct and adapt flexibly, while sustaining integrity and identity. Caused by different trigger events and various internal and external reasons, transitions can take many forms and archetypal patterns (Miller & Friesen, 1980). Even more, organisational arrangements become themselves more and more transitional spaces of liminality and its members need to get ready for liminal moves. Liminality seems to be an important condition by which organisations dangle their usual placedness, re-placed by or transformed towards new forms of practices and emplacements. Spaces and places have always been basic conditions for all transitions of human being, things and occasions. As constitutive medium and lived form spaces and places influence or inflect how we understand, engage and transform in the world (Casey, 1993, p. XV). The way we are placed and how we sense space are inseparably linked to our lived experience of the actual and situated every-day life-worlds. These worlds of living include, besides homes and places of leisure, places of work. With all their artefacts, ongoing practices and relationship, as well as with ambiguous experiences and meanings, places of work have multifarious impacts on those dwelling in them. As media of intentions, passions and actions workplaces are providing a forum for potent experiences of meaningful events (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p. 19). Specific features of the physical environment correlate not only with worker-motivation, job satisfaction, and

productivity, but also with a basic sense of well-being (e.g. Becker, 1981), but can also be experienced as panoptical institution of control (Foucault, 1977). Ambivalently, the way spaces and places are experienced, understood and organised relationally, either enable and include, or constrain and exclude, transitional possibilities and potentialities.

Importantly, transitional places and moves in space refer to spheres of an in-between as very basic constituents of liminality. The *limen* of liminality refers to a threshold or passageway, a state of being *between* two different existential planes. Crossing this threshold is a transient moment, but requires to actually ‘take place’. Like the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building, traversing the liminal refers to a practical move through transitional times and spaces. As thresholds are situated at an edge calling for a movement, they carry with them a sense of opening up towards and closing away from. Very phenomenologically, the state of being in liminality gives space for reflective suspension, moments when action is temporarily held in abeyance (bracketed), and disclosing a space, in which phenomena themselves emerge that is to materialize as or fade out of appearance. Liminality as between-space and between-time (Malpas, 2007) are indeterminate and opaque, realms for never asked questions and non-thought possibilities. Thus the liminal is characterized by an inherent ambiguity, and a specific potential for subversion and transformation, highly relevant for today’s organisations. By linking phenomenology and organisational studies, this paper aims at contributing to a more comprehensive understanding and reflecting implications of embodied places of and for liminality in organisations. Correspondingly the textual space and interpretative place of this paper will be organised as following.

Firstly the term and realms of liminality will be interpreted as a relational construct and dynamic milieu of in-between. Then basic ideas of a phenomenology of space and embodied place as media for liminality and transition will be presented. Such a phenomenological approach allows not only considering the forgotten ground or media of directly felt and lived experience of liminality. Rather, using Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (1962; 1995), essential qualities of the living body and the embodiment of place as they are connected to liminal space reveal important insights about its inter-relationality. Afterwards the text discusses the significance of the liminal and transitional space in organisations and leadership, particularly the embodied and emotional dimensions and the ambiguities of liminality and moving through transitional space. The conclusion will outline some critical implications and perspectives on research and practice in transitional spaces in organisations and leadership.

Inter-standing Transition and Liminality

As already referred in its original Latin pre-fix, *trans-* means ‘across’, ‘beyond’ or ‘on the opposite side’ of something and transition derives from the Latin verb ‘transire’ meaning ‘crossover’. Accordingly, to go through a *trans*-ition is constituted by a journeying, a state of continuous and discontinuous change, restabilising patterns by differentiating and integrating media. Based on this dynamic interpretation it becomes possible to see the liminal as a potential transitional space for a creative *inter-play*, practices particularly by tricksters as liminal agents of change¹.

Classically, liminality has been interpreted in the context of rituals, as a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point, and as such it is a temporary state of highly intensive awareness and reflectivity. In his seminal study van Gennep (1909) described rites of passage, which accompany changes of place, state, social position, and age. According to him these rites consist of three structural phases: separation, marginalization, reincorporation or re-assimilation, referring to pre-liminal, liminal, post-liminal states. Interestingly, there are special acts reserved for transitions between states. These acts are deviant compared to daily activities, designed to limit discomfort and injury as they are extra-mundane and protected. Correspondingly, and based on the comparison between rites in different cultures, religions and times, Eliade (1958) emphasized the cyclical elements in and metaphorical basis of symbolic rituals of passage as sacred, in contrast to the profane. Building on both van Gennep’s structuralist analysis and Eliade’s concept, Turner (1969; 1977; 1982) developed his influential concept of liminal experience and liminal space as a transitional state and marginal ‘location’. According to Turner (1982) liminality refers to being situated in an ambiguous condition that is present at the limits of existing and emerging social structures. He defines liminal individuals or entities as neither here nor there; they are *betwixt and between* the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony (1969, p. 95), which makes them vulnerable but also liberates them from structural obligations (Turner, 1982, p. 27).

As experiences within the liminal temporal, geographic or psychological spaces are not belonging to an old order, or wholly to a new one, they manifest struggles about identity and agency, creating a productive and disruptive ‘third space’. This sphere constitutes a hybrid trans-cultural and inherently uncanny alien territory (Bhabha, 1994, p.56), where distinctions are blurred and politics of polarity are eluded and values can be refashioned.

How much liminal places are part of an in-between sphere, which provides playful potentials, has been shown by Winnicott (1971/1991). He described ‘potential spaces’ as an area of intermediate transitional experiencing that is between inner and outer worlds, ‘between the subjective object and the object objectively perceived’ (Winnicott, 1991, p. 100). Being situated between the imagination and the realisation then new creative experiences emerge that include parts of both. One important element of

this transitional zone between the self and the real world are transitional objects. As ambiguous phenomena these objects are partaking and connecting playfully the internal world of fantasy and future possibility with the external world of reality and constraints. Forming a boundary-region, transitional objects and figures enact and emplace alternative worldly positioning and heterogeneous trajectories (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Importantly, all these qualities transitional spaces and objects are not only relevant for infants, but also influence social adult life to become a creative one (Young, 1989; 1994) and as such are helpful for critically interpreting organisations (Carr & Downs, 2004).ⁱⁱ

Transitional places, like airport, hotels, or being situated in front of computers, refer to what Augé (1995) calls transit through '*non-space*'. For him these are late-capitalist phenomena of self-contained 'supermodernity' resulting in an incoherent perception to which individuals are connected in a uniform manner and where no organic social life is possible. However he tends to underestimate the heterogeneity and materiality of the social networks bound up with the production of non-places/places. Instead of focusing on the presences and absences associated with the polarities of place and non-place, it has been suggested to focus more on the multiple, partial, dynamic and relational 'placings' which arise through the diverse performances and movements associated with travel, consumption and exchange (Merriman, 2004) and organising.

It seems that in contemporary life there exists increasingly a kind of fluid liminality (Rich & Rasmussen, 2002) and permanent state of transition as liminoidityⁱⁱⁱ. Even as some forms and contents of this liminoidity are becoming more routinised, shifting from extraordinary to ordinary (Murphy, 2002), all transition requires embodied spaces and places as media. Therefore, and before relating the liminal and transitional space to organizations and leadership, first basic ideas of a phenomenology of embodied space and place as media for the liminal will be presented.

Phenomenology of Embodied Space & Place as Media for Liminality and Transition

In the following the constitutive role and significance as well as some functions, features and qualities of the space, and place as very medium for transitions will be discussed from an phenomenological perspective. Based on a basic involvement in the world existential spatiality and situated places are constitutive for the human condition. Far from being merely locatory, both space and place are essential for existence that is to 'be' is to be bounded by spatial and placial realities. Through spaces and places the world manifests itself to human beings; and where 'being-in-the-world' happens.

Phenomenologically, place-related experiences are associated with dwelling in-the-world (Bachelard, 1964; Heidegger, 1962) in which space is cleared or freed for settlement and boundary-forming lodging. Unlike the Euclidian homogenous character of space, the Cartesian notion of extension as measurable distance, a Newtonian idea of space as a container or the Kantian separation of space and time, phenomenologically living spaces and places of living – as very base for liminal experiences – are *media* for things, processes and experiences to take place (Stroeker, 1987). Consequently, 'existential space' is not a mere shell, or a location, but a setting for experiences, and life-worldly events, which are implicated in the accomplishment of situated activities. As the very structure and possibility of experience is grounded in place (Malpas, 1999), this binding is not a contingent feature, but rather constitutive for the entire human existence at all. Even more, place refers to a qualitative matrix, that is to a pulsing or 'potentized' field of liminal experience, able to move us even in its stillness (Abram, 1996, p. 190).

Based on an important critical understanding of the differences and relationship between space and place^{iv} a phenomenological interpretation of them relies on an underlying, primordial and living dimension (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 290-294). This embodied and *lived-space* is not geometrical space^v as 'far from my body's being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 117). The body and the world form a dynamic spatio-temporal connection that is oriented by the primacy of the bodily space. Giving the central role of locality as it arises through embodiment, Merleau-Ponty shows that spaces and places are themselves *incorporated within* us.

Embodiment refers to our lived being-and-placed-in-the-world that is an active and reversible process, indicating the negotiation of everyday life in relation to the material and social world (Dale & Burrell, 2008, p. 215). Accordingly, human experience and action is essentially grounded in the placed concrete corporeal therefore are intimately connected with the 'environing' and socio-cultural world in its particularity and immediacy. The living and lived body is always emplaced, and as such takes us to and through spaces and places of transition. Accordingly, the living, moving, and knowing body is bonding and bounded agent, vehicle, articulation, and witness of being in place (Casey, 1993, pp. 48, 313).

Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the embodied subject (Crossley, 1996, p. 101) helps to investigate the relationship and negotiation of the material, the individual, and social in relation to the given and production of space and complex realities of place and liminality. Bodies mediate and navigate humans into co-orientation with places allowing the co-creation of and dwelling in '*place-scapes*' (Casey, 1993, p. 25).

Particular places shape and are shaped by physical objects, events, and causal processes that have both spatial and temporal dimensions as well as by memories, personal and communal narratives, social activities, and institutions. Relating to both internal and external subjective and collective horizons, place is 'a structure comprising spatiality *and* temporality, subjectivity

and objectivity, self and others' (Malpas, 1999, p. 163). Thus, place and its liminal qualities are neither objective nor subjective, but the *relational* 'ground' for both and as such part of a (post-dualistic) social body and reflexive embodiment (Crossley, 2001; 2006).

Inter-Relativity of Spaces and Places

What does it imply that places are not simple locations, but relational (Casey, 1993, p. 65) and that a place is more an *event* than a thing to be assimilated into known categories (Casey, 1996, p. 260)? How can we think of place as medium for liminality in an in-between, processing as an inter-relational event?

Referring to a chiasmic, incorporated intertwining and a reversibility of pre-personal, personal and interpersonal dimensions, Merleau-Ponty's indirect and post-dualistic ontology of elemental 'flesh', as incarnated principle and formative medium (1995), allows a relational base to 'inter-stand' placed phenomena (Taylor & Saarinen, 1994, p. 1, 8). With this philosophy of in-between, we can see that place and placing is only possible by being open to the flux of ambiguous processes of which embodied, spheres are interplaying constituents. It is in a chiasmic nexus, where embodied selves and world entwine, through which relational place is part of ongoing spiralling cycles of dissipation and re-creation of an unfolding co-creation. Following this ontological shift away from a substantialist object located in a Cartesian grid, allows seeing places of becoming as emerging events of passages. A relational approach interprets transitional places and times as a dispersed and inherently indeterminate process, which is continually reconfiguring itself. Thus places of transitions are not simple locations, but relational happenings (Casey, 1993, p. 65), eluding reifying categorisation (Casey, 1996, p. 260).

Relationally, transitional places are not seen reductively as identifiable entities *sui generis* based on individuality or inter-subjectivity or made objectively measurable. With a relational intelligibility in place, attention shifts from an understanding of space as a container to transitional places as what transpires *between* situated people and their placed artefacts-in-use.

With Merleau-Ponty, we can acknowledge the in-between of this becoming as a processual gap or as a corporeal difference (Weiss, 2000): a non-dual relational 'inter-being' (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 208).

Correspondingly, transitional place and placing of and within organising becomes factually based on processes and practices that are jointly structured events and activities within a complex set of inter-relations. Out of these interconnections then embodied perceptions, feelings, cognitions and meanings, and communities, as well as artefacts, structures and functions of transitional place and emplacement are continually created, questioned, re-created, and re-negotiated.

It is this recursive and reversible nexus of in-between of place and placing as an ongoing processes of 'be(com)ing' that serves as the (re-)source for creative transitions. By recognizing the pre-eminence of relational processes, these become *form-in-media*, in which transitional places are continuously co-created and changed in the course of being realised through the practices of organising, leading and following.

A relational approach allows overcoming the inherent problems and limits of a mechanistic and essentialist perspective on space and place in conventional organisational and leadership studies. Relationality encourages to describe 'inter-connections' and processes through which the world of organising, leading, following and its placing are experienced in a continual state of transitional, hyper-dialectical relating (Calori 2002) and becoming (Hernes, 2007; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).^{vi}

Being embedded and entangled in relational practices, organisational practices and particularly those of leader- and followership, can be seen as distributed and dispersed, thus de-centered and disseminated through multiple, dynamic sets of constellations of relationships. Therefore transitional places are shifting cluster of variable elements throughout a configured lattice. All of these dimensions and its forms, formations and transformations of place interrelate and co-create each other within an 'inter-world' as a shared 'inter-mundane' space (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p. 269). Ultimately, it is the inter-relational 'space in-between' (Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000), with its gaps and interstices and therein unfolding in-tensions (Cooper & Law, 1995), which is the 'birthplace' and medium for transitional and meaningful places respectively emplacement of organisations and its members. It is in this processual in-between, where we can find the 'source' and 're-sources' also for creativity, innovation and the added value of embodied practices in organisations and its members. The inclusion of such a relational places and placing in an in-between provides renewed possibilities for developing richer, more textured, understandings of how organising, leading and following are part of a lived and creative involvement and transformation through the liminal.

Transitional Spaces Liminality and in Organisational and Managerial Practices

In which way are the outlined concepts of a relational transitional space and liminality relevant for organisation and leadership research and practice? What role do the body and embodiment play for transitions and transitional spaces in and for them? Why is it important to think about a liminal organization (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003) or liminalities in organising or organising as 'liminalising'? As we have seen before, liminality as the condition and state of be(com)ing in-between and moving through transitional spaces refers to be at the limits or margins of existing arrangement and realities. It is a state of being where

new values, behaviours, social dynamics and functions or structures are emerging and coordinated. This process seems to describe circumstances many organisations and its members are operating and situated in. Apparently, in today's world of change, organisational realities are not only becoming more transitional, but organisation and ways of organising are media or liminal processes. While current organisations are facing various challenges concerning an acceleration of complex and discontinuous change processes, various activities, such as downsizing, delayering, outsourcing and restructuring are increasingly part of organisational and leadership realities. Additionally, being embedded in competitive market dynamics, the necessity to adapt to changes and pressure for innovation requires corporations to transform themselves continuously. As organisations have to incorporate transient realities and transformational movements increasingly, the concept of liminality provides an explanatory potential.

Forms of liminality in occupational life can be found in organisational socialization (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008), particularly work role transition, for example cases of organizational entries and exits (Ebaugh, 1988), or career transitions (Louis, 1980) like promotions, transfers, and demotions; inter-organizational moves or function and profession changes. Liminality and transitional spaces have been linked to management trainees (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2002), and training of so-called 'High-Potential-Managers' (Dubouloy, 2004). Another area is interim-management, being temporarily in an interstitial role of an in- and outsider, while orchestrating stability and instability, and balancing various other opposing pressures also for implementing nasty corporate shake-outs (Goss & Bridson, 1998). Furthermore, management consultants (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003) and embodied performances of management gurus (Carlone, 2006), but also media-practices and intermediality in organisations (Fornäs, 2002) have been explored as transitional states and spaces. All these studies confirm and imply that liminality is not outside or peripheral to organisation and leadership, but in the cracks within its very social structure and processes.

As a metaphor and experience, liminality is informative for investigating the shifting relationship between work and organization as response to requirements of hyper-flexibility (Volberda, 1996) and regional or global competition. This pressure for organizational flexibility and dealing with competitive forces are modifying employment relationships as they are restructured to become more transitory and individualized (Tempest, 2007). Correspondingly, one special field of application of present phenomena of liminality in organisations refers to flexible workers and organizational learning (Tempest & Starkey, 2004). Increasingly, mobile and transient positions of temporary and flexible employees make them liminal. Due to temporal and contractual flexibilisations, employees turn into 'threshold people' (Garsten, 1999, p. 606), who, like their organization, become more episodic, and fragile (p. 604). This state generates positive, but also undermining effects, particularly in temporary project teams (Tempest & Starke, 2004). For temporary or part-time employed staff, a constant liminality can cause a disruption, implying a loss of social bonding and qualities like mutual trust, loyalties and commitments. Not being fully members of their host organization nor its community they operate in a marginal space, and experience liminality as a social limbo. But also more generally, while moving through periods of transition towards developing new perspectives and practices the situation of many organisations and its members is characterized by dissolution of identity, ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. Importantly all of these liminal realities are mediated through embodied and emotional dimensions.

Embodied and Emotional Dimensions of Transitions in Organisations

The significance of liminality lies in that it is a vital and inherent part of embodied and emotional spheres of life-worldly organisations, where placing, spacing and timing happen (Hansen, 2004). It is by this emplacement that organisational practices are being realised and transitions literally take place (Jones et al, 2004). Functionalist and utilitarian orientations tried to determine key elements of organisational space as entities that are divided, controlled, imposed and which have hierarchical, productive, symbolic and social dimensions (Chanlat, 2006). Correspondingly, also leaders and followers organise values through contextual and textual construction of space and place (Waistell, 2006) and linguistically inscribe spacings (Jones, et al., 2004).

Spacing and timing constitute the internal and external horizontal ground of moving, comprehending and communicating in the world of organizing. Importantly, these processes implicate the whole sensorium of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch (Hoskin, 2004, p. 752; Küpers, 2009a). While sensual bodily experience co-constitutes transitional spaces, the existence and movement through transitional spaces influences and impacts in turn on the body and embodiment.

Embodied transitional processes, enable the persons or groups concerned to reconcile and integrate dynamically the inner and outer world, to work through the tensions in the here-and-now between the past and the future and the provisions for a transitional reality and non-linear passage during change processes in organization (Amado & Ambrose, 2001). Importantly, this includes the often underestimated pre-reflexive and non-cognitive dimension involved in transitions and transitional spaces and places.

For developing a more integral understanding of transition in organisation the following discusses some embodied and emotional constituencies. Following the embodied turn in social and organizational science (Hassard, et al., 2000, p. 12) advanced phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 1995) offers possibilities for developing an understanding of a re-embodied organization (Styhre, 2004) and a corresponding sense-based organisational practice (Küpers, 2009a) of transitions. Through their embodied selves the ‘subjects’ of the transitional processes are situated in their life-world in a tactile, visual, olfactory or auditory way. Whatever they think, feel or do, during and in relation to transitions and transitional spaces they are exposed to a synchronised field of inter-related senses (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.207). It is through the living body and situated embodiment, in the midst of a world of touch, sight, smell, and sound of organisational life-worlds in which transitions and its spaces are being experienced and realised. Even more, being embodied is already transitional in situated organising. Within this situatedness, the living body mediates between internal and external or subjective and objective as well as individual and collective dimensions and meanings. It is this body-mediated process that coordinates the relationship between individual behaviour, socio-cultural relations and apersonal artefacts and systems. For example in using resources, workers, who operate computers, ‘tune in’ to their working environment by an embodied ocular and haptic coordination, while in turn being touched by the physical properties of their working terrain (Hindmarsch & Heath 2000).

Or as part rhythmic transition (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997) a corporeal rhythm and timing functions as a patterned energy-flow of action, which is marked in and through the body by varied stress and directional change, influenced by various levels of intensity, speed and duration (Goodridges 1999, p. 43). Importantly many synchronised transitions in organisations are coordinated by living, bodily, spontaneous, expressive and responsive activities as forms of emotion- and aesthetic sensitive answerability (Shotter 2004; Küpers 2002) and mutually placed relationship makes embodied workers and affording workplaces ‘respondents’ and ‘co-respondents’ enacting a specific place-responsiveness (Cameron et al., 2004). In this way transition can be seen as an emergent process of bodily subjects within an embodied context, which is closely linked to emotional dimensions.

Moods, feelings and emotions are highly relevant for any kind of transition in organisations (Küpers & Weibler, 2008). As emotions emerge as potential movement, they imply a particular embodied orientation and enactment of dynamic dispositions for action. Accordingly, the realities of various emotions reflects and organizes the transition of different intentional relation to the persons, objects, events, and actions involved (de Rivera, 1977) or generate particular emotional responses in organisations. The ‘logos’ of emotion begins in the pre-articulated, embodied experience of moving and being moved in some manner and related to an ‘other’. Even more, the already understood, implicit, lived ways of ‘being-in-the-world’ emotionally are shaped by the articulation of reflected meaning through symbols and language, thus implies a cognitive dimension. It is through embodied and symbolic ‘presentational’ acts (Langer, 1953) that emotionally intermediated potential for transitions are triggered. The relation between emotions and organisational change and transformation has been investigated (Huy, 2002; Kiefer, 2002). Emotions are an especially strong force related to job insecurity and layoffs (Brockner et al., 1992), downsizing (Paterson & Härtel, 2002), and resistance (Bovey & Hede, 2001). Employees’ ambivalence towards change initiatives is often linked to conflicts and associated with negative outcomes such as job dissatisfaction and grievances (Kirkman et al., 2000). Although change can be perceived as a challenge or an opportunity and may stimulate positive emotions such as excitement, enthusiasm, pride, and creativity (Goleman et al., 2002), it is more often experienced as threatening, creating negative feelings such as anger, fear, anxiety, cynicism, resentment, and withdrawal (French, 2001). Moreover, moods also affect various trans-formational and transition-related phenomena in organisation (Küpers & Weibler, 2005; Küpers, 2010a). Together with embodiment emotions are a co-constitutive base also for aesthetic processes. When work-places in this way become stages for potential spaces of play and enacted narratives and embodied performances these are not only fixed work-stations, but milieus for movement, rhythms and even dance as media ‘that allows the human body to play with space – seeking a concretisation of spatial possibilities’ (Atkinson, 2008, p. 1089) as an emerging, localised form of ‘aesthetics’ of co-presence (Atkinson, 2008, p. 1083).

Transformational Potential of Transition Management

Liminality provides a transformational potential for organization and leader-/followership, as it not only disrupts the given status quo, but also invites transcending what is taken for granted towards new forms and where social and structure emerges. Particularly, when an organisation becomes overregulated, or trapped in an overemphasis on rigid structures the liminal provides a kind of transformational counterforce. Manifested in trickster-like change agents, liminal practices spontaneously irritate by introducing dis-order or opening up for new formations.

Crossing boundaries and breaking the rules transformational transitions alter the way that things are organized. They mediate or create a life-world that is more complexified, colourful and vivacious, but also uncertain, questionable and indeterminate, calling for *negative capabilities*.^{vii}

The practice of transformations implies a set of mediated forms of multi-folded transitions on various levels in organisations. In particular the interdependent practice of leader- and followership generates transforming effects through interwoven situated

embodied, material, emotional and aesthetic qualities (Küpers 2011). Overcoming the shortcomings of conventional transformational person-centred leadership an inter-leadership (Küpers & Weibler, 2008) includes as transitional dimensions of selves, agents, cultures and systems within a complex interconnected nexus of an integral practice. Based on a dynamic view of integration, such a transitional inter-leadership cannot only 'bear' contradictions and inconsistencies (Conger, 1989), but leverages and moves strategically between poles of multiple paradoxa (Bloodgood & Bongsug, 2010; Clegg et al. 2002).

For example such leadership oscillates on the edges of a mechanistic and organic style, or global and local orientations, while being responsive to contradictions and complexities (Denison et al., 1995). Transitional inter-leaders and -followers are not resolving paradoxa, but holding them open or working through them chiasmically (Küpers, 2012). By keeping and learning from the creative tensions and moving between opposing forces and paradoxes of transitions, these can be dynamically interrelated and transcended. Such moves would not only help reframing entrenched assumptions and meanings, but also developing a more adequate repertoire of understandings and behaviors that better reflects organizational intricacies (Quinn, Kahn, & Mandl, 1994) in the creative zones of transition. Being fertile for further development and inherent in re-evolutionary spiraling towards new levels and ways of being, contradiction can then be taken as an invitation to take part in a game in which serious playfulness encourages the actor to engage fully with the sensorial, emotional and intellectual dimensions of paradoxical experience (Beech et al. 2004, p. 1314).

As part of changing individual and organizational identities (Fiol, 1995) in many occupational passages and professional role-transitions, people experience some kind of identity ambiguity (Corley & Gioia, 2004), and identity dynamics (Ashforth, 2001; Trice & Morand, 1989). This in turn requires an effective narrative identity-work to sustain feelings of authenticity and need to match the narrative repertoires (Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). As stories help people to articulate provisional but continuous selves, while linking the past and the future and enlisting others (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 138), narratives are media, which serve to build *transition bridges* (Ashforth, 2001). In this way they assist crossing the gaps between old and new identities and roles, claimed and granted, in transition-related social interactions as well as to facilitate the interplay between these day-to-day negotiations and the accumulated understandings of a whole life's experience and corresponding reflexive amendments (Ibarra & Barbulescu 2010, p. 149).

Oriented towards long-term sustainability and combined with short-term experimental learning a policy-focused transition management can be envisioned as a process-oriented approach of reflexive governance (Voß & Kemp, 2006). As such it is designed to deal with complexity and uncertainty in a constructive way, while offering a goal-oriented modulation for meeting goals in a recursive cycle (Kemp et al., 2007). An integral transition management refrains from fixing specific measures and strategies too early and too rigidly. Rather it modulates co-evolutionary dynamics that already drive change, 'bending' them in ways that facilitate and nurture transformative innovation and practices of sustainable development (Kemp et al. 2007), which requires new ways of thinking, organising and acting from all actors while facing ambivalences of liminality.

Ambivalences of Liminality

Liminal conditions are both exhilarating and frustrating, as workers were torn between the promise of freedom given by a transitional space, and the promise of stability given by the comfort of a place of their own. The uncertainties involved in allowing the in-between of the liminal to happen can be exciting and enables creative learning, but can also be unsettling and anxiety-provoking, causing a sense of incompetence, fear and loss of control.

The ambivalence of the liminal becomes apparent when temporary workers' employment contracts afford potentially liberating fluidity and creativity while situating them as outsiders, separated from work-based community (Garsten, 1999). Liminality and moving through transitional spaces can be both liberating and daunting for workers. Potentially, being in the liminal frees people from the controls and the social rigidities of organizations, thereby opening the door to enhanced creativity. But equally it places them in a marginal place removed from the benefits of permanent employment with the uncertainty and disadvantages that this entails. There exists also the danger of a loss of genuine transformational qualities of experiencing the liminal if it becomes persistent: As liminality becomes routinised, marginal innovations may be happening all the time, but rarely inventions or break-throughs (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003, p. 287). Furthermore, there are threats of cultic and ideological misuse as neophytes in a liminoid space, largely suspended abilities of critical reflection (Turner, 1969). In the same vein, lectures by management gurus have been interpreted as liminoid places of transition, where overloaded neophytes undergo transformation during which their uncertainty was simultaneously assuaged and deepened (Carlone, 2006).

From a critical perspective also self-help lectures and texts are highly problematic. For example, Covey in his best-selling book on habits of highly effective people (1989), propagates an epiphany-inducing technology to generate a discipline of effectiveness, producing de-saturated, financialized and expressivist, selves and belaboured selfhoods, while also support conservative, universalist and self-exploitive modes of being for late capitalism (Cullen, 2009).

In transitional states, when the old world has not yet passed away, and the new world is not fully formed the sense of security and identity is destabilised, which makes those involved prone to cling to restabilising ideologies.

The ambivalence of the liminal is also shown by a longitudinal ethnographic study of a strategic change consulting project and focusing on liminal experience of sharing business meals (Sturdy et al., 2006). The findings show that multi-structured and layered liminal space is not only creative and unsettling. Rather it can also be highly structured and conservative, as it is connected to and coloured by normal organizational routines and hierarchies, and supplementing norms. Correspondingly they can be used tactically e.g. for assessing trustworthiness, exploring and shaping political dynamics, or as a safety valve for pent up cynicism and frustration. Following defining embedded scripts the liminality of meals reinforces and re-shapes 'partnership' relations and is used as a political, rhetorical and relationship building, time-space, subject to negotiation and contestation.

Because of these potential usages and dangers, there is a need to consider the status of *power* and micro-politics involved in transitions, particularly in the context of long-term process of structural change (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009).

Another issue are pseudo-transitions, in which a superficial change is promoted, instead of a genuine transition. Metaphorically the supposed change is just a rearrangement of the furniture, without embodied, emotional, cognitive and structural transformation and re-orderings, which implies relinquishing old arrangements and to radically embrace new ones.

As transition takes time and effort, assessing the readiness for transition indicates what lies ahead, and what specific competencies and restructuring activities are and will become important. Correspondingly, for transition managers' it is vital to use transitions as an opportunity to reevaluate, not only psychological, and social dimensions, but also to redesign the policies, procedures, and systems, to provide in organization a facilitative environment (Winnicott, 1965) and making it more capable for present transits and 'transition-worthy' in the future (Bridges, 2009).

Conclusion – Implications and Perspectives

The exploration of this conceptual space here ventured into localities and dynamics of liminality, applied to organisation and leadership. Investigating embodied and emotional dimensions of spacing and placing related to the liminal provided insights into organising, leading and following as an emplaced and relational event of mediation. These findings have far-reaching theoretical and methodological implications, particularly for developing a more integral research on organisation and leader- and followership (Küpers & Weibler, 2008). For further investigating transitional space and liminality theoretically and empirically requires 'transitions' of conventional theory and methodology. If a discipline organizes an analytical space (Foucault, 1977, p. 143), there is the need to enter more transitional spaces of research and considering new epistemological locations (Knights, 1992) particularly with regard to liminal phenomena. As transition is about crossing boundaries, also corresponding research requires endeavouring into more multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary orientations (Küpers 2010c).

For this to happen, future research needs to break the largely univocal narrative and open up to multiple and new forms of knowledge and methods. This also implies investigating transitional spaces and liminality with first-, second- and third-person perspectives in its singular and plural forms, and specific methodologies or modes of inquiry (Torbert et al., 2004).^{viii}

Future research could examine how the interaction between individual and organizational levels and priorities, as well as dynamic and relational contexts (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006) affects and impacts experiences or processes involved in liminal spacing. A special focus could be given to embodied and emotional dimensions as well as communicational, improvisational and aesthetic qualities (Küpers, 2009a; Hansen et al., 2007).

An adequately placed liminal organisation and leader- and followership will be also one that gives space for revived forms of practical wisdom (Sternberg et al., 2000). Such a wise practice comprises and enacts possibilities for integral transitions of individuals, teams and organizations in their interdependencies (Küpers, 2007; Küpers & Statler, 2008). An integration of embodied feeling thinking, knowing, and doing effectuate wise practices that support realising transitions authentically while contributing to the 'well-be(com)ing' in organizations (Küpers, 2005).

While a more integral form of embodied transition in organisation is strategically important, it also requires investing time, energy, money and other resources with a long-term orientation. It will be challenging to pursue this undertakings, particularly in current times of increasing pressures to perform, short-term orientation and to produce and measure objectively direct outcomes. Furthermore, transition can be misused for all kind of ideological interests. Calling for transition is always in danger of becoming just another tool or marketing device instrumentalising, appropriating or co-opting the potential of transformational transitions for questionable unsustainable objectives. For that reason, critical questions need to be asked like: What and who is involved in what kind of transition, towards which ends or states, in which ways and before all why? Moreover, how to organize transitional spaces in a way to ensure responsive forms of leading and following not only in economical viable, but also environmental and social sustainable ways? Responding to these questions and for developing proactively, a more prudent and transitional organisations requires an integral responsibility (Küpers, 2010a). Such responsible practice can then become part of a localised

sustainable development and business strategy (Dumreicher & Kolb, 2008; Hofmeister, 2002)^{ix}, which follows a place-conscious orientation (Gruenewald, 2003).

Metaphorically, moving on the limen and through transitional spaces resembles the motion of a tightrope walker, in that through under- and over-balancing, the liminal mover find some dynamic temporary moments of balance and then step forward. Like in dancing, this act of moving is a process of falling and re-arising: The dancing body falls forward, as the foot moves advances in order to avoid tumbling and for then taking a step or leap to regain a dynamic 'equilibrium' while purposes or new challenges leads to move onwards again. It is this movement between the falling during walking and re-grounding, which helps being responsive and re-evaluative within the paradoxical dynamics of 'bounded instability' (Stacey, 2003). Instead of pathological fixations this kind of flexible, embodied liminal moves follow transformative causalities and emergent movements between heterogeneous entities.

By considering and integrating the lived body and forms of embodiments and emotions as media for moving through transitional place-scapes, phenomenology helps to find an appropriate understanding of incorporating transitions in organizations and leadership. In this way the liminal, as a transitional inter-space, co-creates a milieu for an in-between that forms an unfolding and dynamic be(com)ing. Moving through transitional spheres of organising, leading and following is then like setting out for exploring territories and relationships of the unknown by dancing on and beyond transits of limens of inter-places (Küpers, 2010b).

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ⁱ For the archetypal figure and liminal mythic character of tricksters, liminality is their original state of becoming. Their transitional existence in liminality allows 'betwixing' and 'betweening' whom and what they relate to at different entry points, flitting across the borders at any time, penetrating the social structure at will, but not being able to stay. S/He must return to that state of betwixt and between in order to manifest his/her powers. As s/he needs to return to his element, that is liminality it is not possible for him/her to remain static within a given social structure. This liminal nature of the trickster seems to be something that in its radical practice of constantly inverting reality is only possible in mythic literature, while as an existential life-form it is more a temporary phenomenon coming and going, flashing and vanishing. In the modern world with its absorbing or co-opting grip and linearity the danger is to lose one's liminal nature or liminality can be a liability on an individual level. Trickster as personification of ambiguity Radin 1956 xxiii) are trans-former that is deconstructing and re-creating and opening up for different values and practices. Living in liminal times and places trickster withdrawal from conventional social (inter-)action scrutinizing and reconsidering values and basic orientation of the culture from which they are marginalized. Trickster, not only lives on boundaries but also redefines them, sets traps but also evades them while taking the bait, and, while not having their own way of dealing with the world, takes the ways of others and adapts, surviving through this protean flexibility. Trickster may change the world in which they reside but more often will remain on the edge as a disturbing influence, a reminder that things could be different and maybe they should. Trickster does not break rules, but rather redefines them or provides a setting where the rules are, usually temporarily, removed. As the trickster crosses the line, breaks the rules, and undermines duality, he is polytropic, turning many ways (Hyde, 2008, p. 52). With their specific characteristics and competencies like anomalous; trick-player; shape-shifter; situation inverter turning upside down messenger; bricoleur (Hynes, 1993) tricksters function as agents of change for society and organizations by helping or provoking to be creative in seeing things from a different point of view or perspective particularly relevant for organizations.

ⁱⁱ While the notions of transitional objects and potential space are raised within a context of an infant, Winnicott (1991, p. 24) showed that they are not simply confined to the experience of toddlers, but are something that 'throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to and is the basis of the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work and culture. Also in adult life finding a transitional space is an opportunity to develop further and mature allowing a passage from a fused to an autonomous and creative self. From the experience of a connectedness between sense of inner and outer (shared) reality offered by the creative and cultural activity of transitional space meaning and self emerge. In a Schillerian way Winnicott claimed: 'It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self' (Winnicott 1971, p. 54). In the ambiguous transitional realm the tension and strain between inner and outer worlds between separateness and union are not eliminated, but are bound, as they become part of interplaying. The Winnicottian notion of transitional-objects shows how the psychodynamics of self and other are played out through objects, and how these objects function as projections of unconscious thought processes and affective states. Moreover, this interpretation can be extended, by using Serres' theory, to connect the micro-level world of object relations to macro-level social and economic relations particularly applied to organisations and their pathological splitting (Carr & Downs, 2004). Withdrawing from the reigning order of necessity (and instrumentality) they offer (temporary) spaces for creative process, play and imagination to make or give new sense to experiences. Winnicott believed that given a 'good enough' environment, the interplay of the inner world and external reality promotes the development of self and facilitates growth. It is a space where we can develop psychologically, to *integrate* love and hate and to *create, destroy and re-create* ourselves (see Winnicott, 1971/1997, p.41). To enable such spaces of potential in organisations and in the relationship between leaders and followers requires cultivating a playground for developing ideas that is a realm of serious play. Like a caterpillar dissolving into a cellular soup in order to transform into a butterfly, a process only possible because of the containment afforded by the cocoon, organisational containments and supportive relationship hold the transitional space for new identities to emerge, an invisible womb, which can nurture previously unknown realities. By emplacing creative spaces and trying-out-grounds a leeway needs to be given for relatively free movements and unforeseeable possibilities to emerge. In this way the potential space is related to what Foucault (1984) calls '*heterotopia*' which is the *actualised other space*.

ⁱⁱⁱ In an attempt of linking liminality to our times, Turner (1969) used the term liminoid, or liminal-like, for rituals of modern, industrial societies. While liminal phenomena of pre-tribal societies are sacred; liminoid phenomena are typically secular, although they may retain vestiges of the sacred. Turner (1969) noted

the possibility of liminality becoming a permanent condition of contemporary life: with the increasing specialization of society and culture, with progressive complexity in the social division of labor, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities 'betwixt and between' defined states of culture, and society has become itself an institutionalized state (107). Liminality and liminoidity are different in the relation towards societal order. Liminal phenomena appeal to the entire collective in their emotional and intellectual content and are centrally integrated into the total social process, forming with all its other aspects a complete whole (Turner, 1969, p.44). By contrast, liminoid phenomena may be more plural and fragmentary in their relation to the whole culture.

^{iv} For understanding the differences and relationship between space and place, it is worthwhile to have a close look at their place in history and language. The etymology of both terms is revealing: *Place* along with related terms in other European languages such as the German *Platz*, French *place*, and Italian *piazza*, derives from the classical Greek *plateia* and Latin *platea* meaning a 'broad way' or 'open space' (see The Oxford English Dictionary). *Place* brings with it not 'exhausting' notions of openness and spatiality. The origin of the English *space* along with the French *l'espace* can be traced back to the Greek *stadion* (a standard of length) and the Latin *spatium* (distance, magnitude or interval). Thus, *space* designates a realm of atemporal physical extension, a realm within which we make sense of notions of volume, site and shape; of length, breadth and height of distance and position as those notions apply to physical objects. In a broader sense *space* means room including the non-physical and refers to dimensionality and direction. Accordingly, *space* is conceived as abstract geometry that is a general, universalised sphere. As such it is interpreted as detached from material form and cultural interpretation (Hillier & Hanson, 1984). Reversely, and put positively, *place* is *space* filled up by people practices, objects, and representation (Gieryn, 2000, p.465) and meaning. Both *space* and *place* are 'givens' and products of social practice and different sorts of possibly colliding cultural logics albeit different systems of practice. By considering re-*place*-ing *space* and re-*space*-ing *place*, '*space* is a practiced *place*' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 117) but also *place* can be taken as practiced *space*. While existence requires *space* and is essentially spatial, it is always situated that is bodily existence in a *place*, and *implaced*. We are *located* in *space*, but we feel, interpret, *act* in *place*, imbued with social meanings. Therefore *places* are series of affordances for action and what make the experience of *space* possible. Furthermore *place* is a *space* which is invested with understandings of behavioural appropriateness, individual, social and cultural expectations and orientations. To put in other words, *places* are those enlivened '*spaces*' - built or in some way physically carved out - which are perceived, felt, imagined, interpreted, understood narrated (Soja, 1996). *Places* are endlessly made, not just through brick and mortar, not just when given form to function, but also when we extract from continuous and abstract *space* a bounded, identified, meaningful, named, and significant *place* (Etlin, 1997). A *place* is remarkable as it is constituted by an unwinding spiral of material form and interpretative understandings or experience (Gieryn, 2000, p.471). As such *places* both constrain and enable us. On the one side they offer us structural, cultural, social clues that shape our conduct and our actions and interactions within that *place* add to its meanings (Sack, 1997, p.13). On the other side being institutional frames, *places* can and do constrain and shape action (Goffman, 1961). As such *place* stabilizes and gives durability to spatial and social structural categories, differences and hierarchies. For example, *place* arrange patterns of face-to-face interaction that constitute network-formation and collective action as it embodies and secures otherwise intangible cultural norms, identities, memories-and values (Gieryn, 2000: 473). *Place* sustains (spatial) difference and hierarchy both by routinizing daily rounds in ways that exclude and segregate categories of people, and by manifesting in visible and tangible ways the cultural meanings variously ascribed to them. *Places* organise *space* in terms of material, personal, interpersonal, cultural, political, imaginary, and symbolic dimensions and their interrelationship. Thus, in a way, *places* are organised *space*, however *places* lose their character when organised merely spatially. That is such reduced *space* is what *place* becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are decontextualised and in a way 'sucked out' (de Certeau, 1984; Harvey, 1996). Correspondingly, there has been a substantial critique of abstract *space* subordinating *place* (Casey, 1997; Lefebvre, 1991; Abram, 1996) showing the need for reintegrating a relational understanding to re(dis)-cover the significance of dimensions of *space* and *place* as events. Furthermore, a transitional *placed space* resembles an open porous social spaces as described by Benjamin (1985), within which there is no absolute allocation of what happens and where boundaries and opposites interpenetrate.

^v Merleau-Ponty does reject the type of geometric a priori favored by Husserl, however, for he claims that 'Real', i.e., perceived, triangles, do not necessarily have, for all eternity, angles the sum of which equals two right angles, if it is true that the *space* in which we live is no less amenable to non-Euclidean than to Euclidean geometry (1962, p. 391). This estimate of the underdetermination of physical geometry is potentially misleading, however, for it seems to imply that any geometry is straightforwardly consistent (no less amenable) with the physical evidence. Rather, specific physical assumptions are required in order to render a particular geometry consistent with empirical data, and these assumptions can be challenged in numerous ways: e.g., given the evidence confirming the General Theory of Relativity, one needs to invoke peculiar universal forces so as to retain Euclidean geometry, and thus reject the much simpler non-Euclidean geometry actually employed by the theory. See, also Merleau-Ponty's class notes (2003, p. 101-105), which appears to commit the same oversight.

^{vi} Interpreting *spaces* as recursive processes resulting of boundary setting the perceivable stabilisation is organised through *space* formation and reproduction and different *spaces* brought into interaction lead then to change (Hernes et al. 2006). According to Hernes et al (2006, p. 60) it is in creating *spaces*, that instability is induced. Therefore *space* production and reproduction always entail unforeseen consequences, in which then changes reside (ibid. 61). Likewise, Clegg and Kornberger (2006, p. 154) define *spaces in between* as those 'where differences unfold: differences in-between inside-outside, formal-informal, old-new etc.' and suggest the strategy of the void in order to design *space* for creative organising (ibid. 155). It is this transitional *space* of an in-between, as a kind of '*inter-space*', which together with '*inter-place*' and inter-face play an important role in and for placing leader- and followership in organizations (Küpers, 2010b).

^{vii} For entering the spheres of transitional *spaces* and moving through transitions the idea of a negative capability as expressed by the poet Keats is inspiring. He describes as capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason (Keats in Gittings 1970, p. 43). This being in uncertain[ty] and state of intentional open-mindedness is a *place* between the mundane, ready reality and the multiple potentials of a more fully understood existence. It implies the capacity to sustain reflective inaction (Simpson et al., 2002) and to resist the tendency to disperse into actions that are defensive rather than relevant for transitional states and tasks. Not knowing what to do and tolerating ambiguities, paradox, uncertainties and complexities for being in the present moment is not only relevant for leadership practice (Simpson & French 2006) but in particular for transitions. Whereas positive capabilities enable to make things happen fast and effectively, conversely negative capability is the capacity to wait without expectations and to hold back the tensions and pressure for solution or quick fixes in response to problems and uncertainties. It is through the very negating of habitual patterns of pressured action that allows the creative process its own rhythm and prevents premature closure. The root meaning of 'capable', like 'capacity' and 'capacious' are derived from the Latin word *capax*, 'able to hold much' thus refers to 'containing' or 'spacious' whereas the volume of a container is a measure of its internal 'negative' *space*. However the 'negativeness' of this capability does not indicate negativity, deficiency or insignificance but refraining from action, which may facilitate change and transitions (French, 2001). The active aspect of negative capability is to inhibit the patterns that perpetuate a controlling attitude. The focus is negative in the sense of negating what we know, leaving the *space* as emergent. The deeper aspect of the creative process gets a chance to operate when we open the *space*. Negative capability is both the ability to resist the inappropriate pressure for solution and the capacity to hold the creative tension. It requires considerable skill to remain detached enough to know, not only how, but also when to act - the ripe moment. Negative capability can create an intermediate *space*, a receptive state of intense and live waiting, attending to deeper patterns of meaning. Negative capability is relevant to organizational change management and transitions because it represents the ability to absorb and respond creatively to the emotional turmoil which can both arise from and in turn cause change and need to be balanced with positive capabilities (French 2001, p. 487).^{viii} Methodologically for investigating transitional *spaces* and *places* in organisation and of leader- and followership we need shifting from a way of knowing by 'looking at' to a way of knowing by being placed that is 'in contact, or in touch with... the adoption of an involved rather than an external uninvolved standpoint' (Shotter, 1993, p. 20). This implies focussing on the relationally placed social environment and what this 'allows' or 'permits'. Furthermore, instead of taking isolated observational stances and starting points of reflection the emphasis needs to focus on negotiated procedures and local embedment in everyday life and locally constituted situations or circumstances (Shotter, 1993, p. 20) as realised in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and an applied and integral

pheno-practice (Küpers 2009b). Practically, also forms of transitional writing (Crème, 2008) are valuable reflective practices that introduce an important element of story-making or personal narrative into academic writing.

^{ix} According to Dumreicher and Kolb (2008, p. 318) sustainability 'is a local, informed, participatory balance-seeking process, operating within a Sustainable Area Budget, exporting no nocuous imbalances beyond its territory or into the future, thus opening the spaces of opportunity and possibility.' – Local: It happens at a specific place—the living environment of a settlement within its region, including living patterns and creativity of the tenants. – Informed: It benefits from the tools of the global scientific community and requires an interdisciplinary approach, which provides cause and effect feedback as well as systemic loops. – Participatory: It needs informed, empowered, gender sensitive human actors who are the stakeholders in the sustainability negotiation process. – A balance-seeking process: It models alternative future scenarios, taking into account the classical triad of sustainability: economy, ecology, socio-culture, complemented by the context of built environment. – Sustainable area budget: It operates within people's fair earth share. – Spaces of possibilities: Sustainability considers the future as an open space where socio cultural life quality, economic equity, and ecological needs converge towards balance .